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The Days of Yore at Iowa State

By A. T. ERWIN*

President Beardshear proudly announced at a January, 1900, faculty meeting, the first one which I had the privilege of attending, that the enrollment was approaching the one thousand mark. Compared with the present day figure of over nine thousand, that seems like a small number. However, in view of the fact that ten years previously the attendance was less than three hundred, there was a reason for satisfaction in making the announcement.

At the same meeting President Beardshear said, "I want to unfold a dream to you, a vision of the future of Iowa State." The legislative budget included a proposed millage tax which would provide funds for a building program for the next decade. Included in this program were a new main building, and halls for engineering, agriculture and several laboratories.

The bill met with strong opposition, particularly from a northeastern Iowa senator, a trustee of one of Iowa's smaller colleges. He was quite convinced that the passage of this act spelled the death knell of these colleges. The bill passed the last day of the session, indeed the last item on the calendar.

The passage of this bill marked the beginning of a new era at Iowa State, the realization of a dream come true. Sadly, however, the one who had dreamed, planned and worked to make it a reality did not live to see its fulfillment, for Dr. Beardshear¹ died two years later.

OLMSTEAD PLAN

The passage of the millage tax provided funds for the major buildings on the central campus. The problem then arose as to their location. And the necessity of an

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¹ William M. Beardshear served as president of Iowa State College from 1891 till his death in 1902.

overall landscape plan for the orderly development of the campus became evident. The buildings and grounds committee held a number of meetings at which various plans were proposed, none of which seemed to meet with general approval.

At this stage in the proceedings, as secretary of the committee, I suggested to President Storms² who acted as chairman, that we secure the services of some outstanding landscape architect. He heartily approved of the idea and asked for suggestions. I recommended Olmstead Brothers, provided we could secure the services of John Charles. Having previously been in the employ of this firm, I felt confident that we would thus have the benefit of a man of national reputation and wide experience in this field. He was also an individual who studied a problem carefully before committing himself, but once he reached a conclusion he was adamant in his decisions.

Olmstead called attention to the fact that the college had switched from the informal Gothic type of architecture to the formal Grecian type; therefore, the new buildings should bear a formal relationship to each other. Agricultural Hall, now Curtiss Hall, should be placed on axis with Central Building, now Beardshear Hall. Laboring under the misapprehension that Olmstead meant the elimination of the open naturalistic effect on the central campus, his program met with widespread opposition from the alumni.

At that time the veterinary buildings were located on the site of the present Memorial Union. Their proposed removal aroused the ire of the retired head of that division, likewise the dean of agriculture was anything but happy regarding Olmstead's recommendations. The topsy-turvy growth which took place on campuses having a growth parallel to ours has surely emphasized the value of the master plan which was adopted for our campus, and has also vindicated the foresight and

² Albert B. Storms was president from 1903 to 1910.

wisdom of Olmstead in foreseeing problems which have arisen years later.

PROTECTING CAMPUS ENTRANCES

The growth of the college brought with it accompanying problems regarding the development of the area adjoining the campus entrances. In 1900 a small grocery store at the foot of Ash Avenue was the only business house in the Fourth Ward. Not long thereafter, several business houses were built at the Welch Avenue entrance, and it seemed evident that the entire area facing the campus on the south would be similarly developed. At that time Ames had neither a planning commission nor a zoning board. Consequently, the only alternative was to zone the area against business by paying the property owners an agreed sum for imposing business restrictions. State funds could not be used. At the expense of some extra shoe leather, I took on the job of raising the money by subscription.

This agreement covered the block between Ash Avenue and Lynn. Later a concerted effort was made to break the agreement. A small cleaning plant was established at the foot of Ash Avenue as a test case. The college promptly met the challenge and the State Supreme Court rendered a verdict in favor of Iowa State.

FORAGING

Webster defines "foraging" as a raid, and that was just what occurred every now and then with the dormitory boys. The dormitory board was very inexpensive, being only \$2.25 per week, and while substantial the bill of fare was rather monotonous. The deficiency was sometimes supplied from some farmer's chicken house. As a consequence, the president was confronted every so often by an irate farmer with a bill for chickens.

However, on one occasion a raid worked out very differently than planned. It was a pleasant moonlight night, and the gang had planned to assemble at midnight on the old Boone road west of the campus. Here President Beardshear who had been tipped off unexpectedly joined the party. "Good evening, boys, you out for a

stroll?" he inquired. "Well fine, do you mind if I stroll with you?" They passed the farm which the boys had spotted for a raid, but only longing glances were cast in that direction. For a few miles stories were exchanged and all went merrily along, but as the miles lengthened and the stories gave out, so did the feet. Still there was just one thing to do, follow the leader, so on they trudged for many a weary mile. At Boone, President Beardshear loaded the boys on an eastbound train. They arrived on the campus just in time for breakfast, there to face their fellow students deeply chagrined and weary, but wiser lads.

OLD MAIN

The Old Main occupied the site of the present Beardshear Hall. It was a combination of dormitories for boys, classrooms and administrative offices. On the north and south wings were much coveted quarters known as the tower rooms which were occupied by seniors only. Many are the stories repeated by the seniors of the Old Main. This one was related to me recently by Carl F. Langlas of the Class of '96 who occupied a tower room. Carl brought from home a large armchair. To cure some of the lower classmen from occupying this chair for seniors only, the arms were electrified. The next evening there was a knock at the door. "Come in if you want to, but if you don't want to, stay out," was the response. In walked President Beardshear who made a bee line for that armchair. A wince or two convinced the boys that the juice was on all right, but only a smile came from the President—a giant physically, mentally and spiritually, and one who knew how to deal with men.

CAMPUS PHONE SYSTEM

The interdepartmental phone system of those early days was a far cry from the one which is now being installed. Each department was represented by a numbered button in a series. You acted as your own "central." To call a particular department you moved the lever over to the proper button and turned the crank

for a specified number of rings depending upon whom you wished to reach in that department. Sometimes the wires got crossed, as in the case where I endeavored to reach a Mr. Sales south of town. "Hello, is this Sales?" I enquired. "No, this is profit and loss," responded Professor Bissell of the mechanical engineering department.

KENT'S LAKE

Lake LaVerne represents the second attempt to provide a body of water for the campus. The first one known as Kent's Lake was located on the bottom directly south of the Agricultural Annex. The lake soon filled with sediment resulting from erosion. For years it was just a very shallow body of water famous for its bullfrogs which the campus kids loved to hunt. However, these youngsters found another diversion one day. About noon a message came to the office requesting that if anyone saw Morrell Marston to send him home as this was his birthday. As we drew near the lake the air was filled with warwhoops. In the water was Morrell, now Major-General Marston if you please, held at bay by a bunch of pranksters armed with clubs, who had not been invited to the party. When rescued covered with mud from head to foot, he was hardly attired for a birthday party.

The expense of excavating for Lake LaVerne was borne by LaVerne Noyes, a wealthy Chicago alumnus. The dam at the east end of the lake was designed by a Mr. Simons who was employed by Mr. Noyes. The construction of the dam was in the hands of Frank Mann, an experienced bridge engineer. A number of trusted convicts were employed on the campus at that time, and Mr. Mann had such a crew on the dam. In the interests of a more stable construction as the dam upstream had given way in a recent flood, Mann made some unauthorized changes in the design of the dam. As the dam was nearing completion he discovered Mr. Simons heading toward the lake on a tour of inspection. Mr. Mann yelled to the men to get some planks and

cover up the work, and assigned them to another job. As soon as Mr. Simons departed he ordered them to remove the planks and proceed with the pouring of the concrete. About this time he overheard one of the convicts remark to a fellow workman, "By gosh, the crooks ain't all at Fort Madison, are they?"

BOARD OF CONTROL INSTEAD OF BOARD IN CONTROL

Iowa State College was governed for many years by a Board of Trustees. The enabling act establishing the college stipulated that the college finances should be audited annually by the Board of Control and a report made to the governor. The use of that little two-lettered word "of" instead of "in" placed this responsibility in the hands of the STATE BOARD OF CONTROL. The auditing was done for several years by one of their members, a Mr. John Cownie. One year when on such a mission, he requested some paper of Mr. Herman Knapp,³ and was given a sheet of writing paper. In his report to the governor he made note of the fact that he was given writing paper instead of scratch paper, and in harmony with his Scotch ancestry the incident was cited as an example of extravagance. A year later he was back on the same mission and again made the same request. This time Treasurer Knapp handed him the wastebasket with the admonition, "Just help yourself, Mr. Cownie."

HAZING

For several years the upper classmen, particularly the sophomores, seemed to take delight in making life miserable for the freshmen. In order to readily identify them, the freshmen were required to wear a red cap. However, a little fellow put a quietus on the practice one spring. A group of upper classmen encountered Campbell in the horticultural orchard and planned to stretch him. "You mind your business and I'll mind mine," warned Campbell. The man in the lead made

³ Herman Knapp was also Registrar, twice acting President and later business manager for many years during a long career on the college staff dating from 1883 to 1927.

a charge for him and a second later a bullet grazed his toe. "In Montana a fellow don't take an insult like that laying down," said Campbell.

In the spring of 1902 occurred the worst student riot in the history of the college. The freshmen had planned to have a class banquet in Margaret Hall dining room. After the group had gathered the upper classmen turned a fire hose through the plate glass windows, breaking dishes, destroying food and drenching the guests. Their speakers were kidnapped. A hydrogen sulfide generator drove everyone from the building and the electric wires were cut. The legislature was in session and President Beardshear was in Des Moines on important matters pertaining to the college appropriation. The newspapers headlined the student riot at Iowa State, and played up the destruction of college property at just the time the president was working hard to put over some very important legislation. President Beardshear hurried back to Ames and called a convocation. The students were still in a boisterous mood as they assembled and class yells filled the air. Mr. Beardshear, without any preliminaries in a commanding tone of voice, read that memorable poem of Edward Roland Sill, "The Fool's Prayer." The closing line of each verse read, "Oh, Lord, be merciful to me, a fool." The students quickly caught the implication and the significance of those lines. Without adding a further word the audience was dismissed. Quite in contrast with the rowdy spirit in which they entered, they retired in a quiet, orderly manner. I have never witnessed a more masterly command of a difficult situation.

TUG OF WAR

A brick kiln west of the campus provided the brick for the older buildings on the campus. The clay pit formed a water hole known as Briley's Pond. A tug-of-war across this pond was substituted for hazing. However, neither side seemed to relish being dragged through

the mud, and the pulling and hauling seemed more like work than play; thus ended hazing.

SMALLPOX SCARE

During President Storms' administration an outbreak of smallpox occurred on the campus, and we were all ordered to be vaccinated. One morning a group of agricultural students appeared for vaccination. Shortly thereafter the head nurse heard a commotion back of the hospital. Here was the same group again in line. At the head end was one of their number, a bottle of alcohol in one hand and a swab of cotton in the other, which he proceeded to apply to the treated arm as they passed in review. The group was identified as the class in dairy bacteriology, of which Dr. Frank Bouska was the instructor. "Dr. Bouska, are you opposed to this vaccination program?" inquired President Storms. "Quite the contrary, Mr. President, I think it is a good idea." "But you gave your students information as to how to counteract the vaccine, did you not?" "Well, but Mr. President, I am a professor of bacteriology. They asked me a hypothetical question, and I gave them a hypothetical answer." "Dr. Bouska, just defer any further hypotheticals, please until this campaign is over."

The smallpox patients were confined in a building known as the Pest House. The outlook from this building was rather foreboding, for it adjoined the college cemetery. Happily, however, none of the patients found a permanent resting place there.

UNBIDDEN GUEST

It was a pleasant autumn day and the students were pursuing the even tenor of their way at Beardshear Hall. Suddenly the building was filled with a penetrating odor. Clearly it was not the barrage of an enemy; neither was it the fragrance of new-mown hay. Custodian Edwards responded promptly to the emergency call. One whiff and he readily identified the unbidden guest as a small, innocent-looking animal, black in color with white stripes down its back, and a beautiful bushy tail; but where was it? Not in the basement for a corps of

janitors had thoroughly searched that quarter. Finally the mystery was solved. One of the veterinary students according to tradition, who desired to try out his skill, had carefully extracted a vial of this potent fluid, 99 and 9/10 pure. The vial finally landed in the botany lab on the top floor of Beardshear Hall. One day it was tossed out the window and the smashed bottle landed on the intake fan. In just a few minutes, the efficiency of the ventilating system was amply demonstrated.

Resignation of Annals Editor

The retirement of Emory H. English as editor of the ANNALS OF IOWA was effective with the April number of the current volume. He came with the Department of History and Archives in April, 1943. Previous service in the state government both in legislative and administrative capacities, added to the value of his employment in the Historical department. At times he handled other duties in addition to editorial work.

Mr. English succeeded Ralph Young as assistant curator in 1944 and three years later, upon retirement of Curator Ora Williams in December 1946, was acting curator until July 1, 1947, when Claude R. Cook became curator. The total period of his editorship covered 15 years. In his retirement, he will continue to reside in Des Moines.

The new editor beginning with this number of the publication is Fleming Fraker Jr. of Mitchellville, Iowa. He is a former teacher, a graduate of the State University of Iowa and has completed additional work in history at Drake University in Des Moines. Since joining the staff Mr. Fraker has been engaged in arrangements and plans for his work on the ANNALS.

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